

minimum wage that accurately reflects current economic conditions.

The majority has decried this amendment as non-germane and accused the minority of holding up the underlying legislation. While the amendment may not be germane in a procedural sense, it is certainly relevant, it is certainly appropriate, and it deserves an up or down vote.

Indeed, as my able colleague Senator KENNEDY mentioned earlier on the floor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, as recently as March of 2002, has acknowledged that moving people to jobs that pay at least the minimum wage is the centerpiece of TANF. Minimum wage jobs are the centerpiece of TANF.

But in order for people to move off these rolls and still support their families, such jobs must provide a livable wage. Mr. President, if the true goal of this legislation—as has been stated—is to reduce the number of individuals enrolled in our Nation's welfare system, this amendment would directly serve to accomplish that goal.

To achieve self-sufficiency, a working family needs more. By working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, an employee will earn \$10,700 at the current minimum wage. For a family of three, that represents an income that falls \$5,000 below the poverty line.

And this is a pervasive trend. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2002 the number of working poor in the United States stood at 8,954,000. This is unacceptable. If Americans are willing and able to work full time jobs, they should be able to provide for their family.

At the current minimum wage, this situation is not likely to improve any time soon. According to the Congressional Research Service, the minimum wage today is at its lowest level in terms of purchasing power since the 1940s. And each day we fail to act, inflation continues to erode this purchasing power. As this happens, workers earning the minimum wage will only become more and more dependent on the government assistance to make ends meet.

If enacted, at its full implementation, the Kennedy amendment would increase this wage to \$7 an hour. This would provide an increase in the incomes of minimum wage earners by \$3,800 a year, which represents a positive step toward purchasing power that comports with modern day needs and prices.

The other side will argue that increasing the minimum wage will hurt business and stunt job growth. They argue that we need to give more tax cuts to the wealthiest among us, run large and growing Federal deficits, and hope that things improve.

Mr. President, this has been our policy for over three years since this Administration took office. In that time, we have seen the largest job loss in our Nation's history. We have seen Federal surpluses erased in favor of record defi-

cits. And we have been told time and time again by the Administration that things will turn around soon.

However, today's release of state-level job growth data by the Bureau of Labor Statistics flies in the face of the Administration's assertions in this regard. These statistics indicate that 49 states failed to meet the Bush Administration's projections for job creation in the month of February 2004. As of February 2004, 35 states have failed to get back to their pre-recession employment levels. Furthermore, 49 states have not created enough jobs to keep up with the natural growth in the number of potential workers, as job growth has lagged the growth in working-age population since March 2001. As for the unemployed, 43 states have higher unemployment rates than when the recession began. As a Nation, the cumulative job growth shortfall is over two million jobs since July 2003, when the first of this Administration's tax cuts went into effect.

Raising the minimum wage will not only benefit low-income wage earners, it will provide economic stimulus by putting additional dollars in the hands of those who must spend them to make ends meet. When the Congress last increased the minimum wage, the economy experienced its strongest growth in over three decades. Nearly 11 million new jobs were added. This is quite a different result from the economic policies we have pursued under the current Administration.

Mr. President, increasing the minimum wage is the fair thing to do and it is sound economic policy. I urge my colleagues to support the Boxer-Kennedy amendment.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO CESAR CHAVEZ

Mr. REID. Mr. President, today is the 77th birthday of someone whom I admire greatly, Cesar Chavez. He was born March 31, 1927. I never had the opportunity to meet Cesar Chavez. I came close a couple of times, but I never had the opportunity to meet him.

He was a leader, a great father, a man of great moral character, and a humanitarian. He was a man whose name is synonymous with a broad social movement that accomplished substantive things. He was guided by principles of nonviolence and respect for human labor. He dedicated his life to helping those who had no voice. And that is an understatement.

Whether he was leading a 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento or staging one of his prolonged hunger

strikes, Cesar Chavez worked tirelessly to focus attention to the inhumane conditions endured by migrant farm workers.

He gave life, dignity, and strength to the United Farm Worker movement. He knew firsthand the plight of migrant farm workers. He went to work in the fields and vineyards when he was only 10 years old, which was fairly standard at the time. He was forced to leave school in the eighth grade to help support his family. But even though he didn't have a lot of book learning, so to speak, he was a brilliant man. In 1944, he served his country in the United States Navy.

Forty-two years ago, Mr. Chavez joined Dolores Huerta, whom I have had the opportunity to meet. She is still an avid activist and gives inspiration to people in the State of Nevada and throughout the country. Forty-two years ago, Chavez and Huerta founded United Farm Workers Association.

Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers Union opened the eyes of the American people. For the first time, many Americans began to learn about the hard lives and inhumane treatment of the workers who helped put food on the table.

Cesar Chavez was an integral figure in the birth of La Causa, as our Nation's Latino civil rights movement is sometimes called. Organized labor, religious groups, minority students, and many other people of good will joined Chavez in his fight to secure the rights and improve the lives of migrant farm workers.

Cesar Chavez is probably our Nation's most recognized Hispanic American historical figure, but he did not help only Latinos but Irish, Asian, Indian, German, Mexican. When it came to aiding farm workers, Cesar Chavez drew no racial lines. He placed his life on the line many times. He did it by protesting, by denying his body nourishment, in order to nurture the cause he so well served.

In 1968, he staged a fast. For 25 days, he ate no food. In 1972, he repeated this for 24 days. But, in 1988, he fasted for a remarkable 36 days. He embraced the philosophy of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He sought to bring about deep-rooted change through non-violent means.

In those many difficult days migrant farm workers lived in makeshift homes with no plumbing, heat, or running water. It was not uncommon for them to be sent into a field or vineyard while the crop-dusting plane was actually dropping pesticides. And, in most cases, little or no attempt was made to educate the children of these farm workers.

Things have changed as a result of his work. Take, for example, the onion fields of northern Nevada, Lyon County. Farm workers now have very nice facilities. They have to meet certain standards. They watch how many hours they work. They have rights they never had but for this man, Cesar Chavez.